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Reflexive Grappling with Theory and Methods of Text Analysis: Race and Racism Represented in History Textbooks

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Abstract

Theoretical and methodological matters pertaining to school textbook analysis are an under-researched and under-documented area of specialisation. In this article I attempt to contribute to this field by reflecting on my own experience of grappling with these issues as relevant to the study of a number of South African school history textbooks. The topic of investigation is that of race and racism. I use this as a vehicle for operationalising the theoretical and methodological issues at hand. A key issue is whether historians and other 'scientists' make the methods of their disciplinary discoveries explicit or not, and the implications this could have for developing historical understanding. In the second part of the article I explain the theoretical position I assume towards the object of my study. It is a hermeneutic realist stance; a stance that attempts to use the researcher's (own) particular historically and culturally conditioned mindset in the interpretive process. In some cases this led to an interpretation of the messages communicated in the textbook as flat and sterile, reinforcing stereotypes, while in others the reader is drawn into a discourse that tends to appeal to his or her humanity rather than judgement.

Key words: history textbook research; reflexive; subject positioning; theoretical and methodological considerations; text analysis.

Introduction¹

The impetus for writing this article came from a realisation that there is a paucity of theoretical and methodological consideration in the field of textbook research.² In an attempt to contribute

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2. See J. Nicholls, 'The Philosophical Underpinnings of School Textbook Research', *Paradigm: Journal of the Textbook Colloquium*, 3, 3 (2007), 24–25; also P. Weinbrenner, 'Grundlagen und Methodenproblem Sozialwissenschaftlicher Schulbuchforschung', in K.P. Fritzsche, ed., *Schulbücher auf dem Prüfstand: Perspektiven der Schulbuchforschung und Schulbuchbeurteilung in Europa, in Studien zur Internationalen Schulbuchforschung* (Braunschweig: Georg-Eckert-Institut, 1992), 33–34; and E.B. Johnsen, 'Are We

to this field of knowledge, this article makes use of my PhD study as a tool for recording and reflecting on theoretical and methodological problems and approaches to the information found in a range of school history textbooks. I do not claim to have come up with a blueprint for textbook analysis. I am merely exploring the theoretical foundations from which may emerge *some* methodological implications. Such implications may then be traced back to the ideas presented in the books as originating from subjective thinking.

The aim of this article is thus to show how the subjectivity of the researcher, or the text reader/analyst, is constructed in a particular case; in other words, I attempt to analyse my own ‘interaction with the text’ or ‘conduct towards the text’.³ It is then possible to appropriate this process to other cases and to understand more about the interaction, and the process by which to become aware of this interaction, between reader and texts in a comparative manner. Since research methods are not *procedures* but *ideas*,⁴ the aim is not to make generalisations, but rather to make the flow of the ideas transparent.

What the Existing Literature Points to and What it Lacks

The existing literature repeatedly points to the problem of analysing historical educational materials without a sound methodological or theoretical basis.⁵ Often the problem is that such research is motivated by extra-pedagogical interests and modes of questioning⁶ that are politically rather than pedagogically motivated. In other words, the interest is not aimed so much at helping students and teachers understand the material, but rather at addressing social and ideological controversies.⁷ Since there is no ideologically neutral stance that can be taken towards the past,⁸ often the result of history textbook analysis leads to yet another timeworn conclusion: that textbook content is an ideological construct that serves the current political needs of the specific country or a particular system.⁹

This is not a new problem, yet no sustained effort to overcome it has been noted in the literature. For example, as early as 1969, Holsti warned that unsystematic attempts at content analysis result in ‘going fishing’ for information without a preconceived methodological plan.¹⁰ Or, as Lowenthal puts it:

Because [it] is open to all and matters so passionately to many, history is readily seized on as a weapon for this or that cause, this or that faith – it continually risks being turned into civics and heritage. But just because history is amateur [i.e. in that it has no theoretical jargon and requires no grounding in some arcane aspect of human nature]

Looking for It in the Same Way? Some Remarks on the Problem of Ideological Investigations of Textbooks and Methodological Approaches’, in Fritzsche, ed., *Schulbücher auf dem Prüfstand*, 93.

3. J. Heritage, ‘Goffman, Garfinkel and Conversation Analysis’, in M. Wetherell, A. Taylor and S. Yates, eds, *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (London: Sage, 2001), 49.

4. G. Shank, book review of K. Ercikan and W.-M. Roth, eds, *Generalizing from Educational Research: Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Polarization*, in *Teachers College Record*, 7 April 2009.

5. S.J. Foster and K.A. Crawford, *What Shall we Tell the Children? International Perspectives on School History Textbooks* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2006), 11.

6. Weinbrenner, *Grundlagen und Methodenproblem*, 38.

7. See also Johnsen, ‘Are We Looking for It in the Same Way?’, 81.

8. Holsti, cited in R.C. Wade, ‘Content Analysis of Social Studies Textbooks: A Review of Ten Years of Research’, *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 21, 3 (1993), 247.

9. See for example Marsden’s documentation of how the socialist attitudes in Russia and East Germany were reproduced in history textbooks in the 1940s: W. Marsden, *The School Textbook: Geography, History and Social Studies* (London: Woburn Press, 2001), 180.

10. Holsti, cited in Wade, ‘Content Analysis of Social Studies’, 247.

does not mean it is easy; just because it is ideally open to all is not to allow that one historical opinion is as good as any other.¹¹

The South African curriculum for the study of Social Sciences and History recognises this problem and was designed with mixed intentions: to provide learners with skills to make them good historians, but also to instil values and attitudes in them that are congruent with the Constitution in terms of its citizenship values. In 2003 the initially elaborate and complex curriculum was simplified by a reduction of the number of learning outcomes (what a student is supposed to be able to do) and assessment standards (ways of measuring whether the outcomes have been achieved). More content was added to support teachers and also to enable learners to develop historical thinking skills such as evaluating a variety of sources and forming their own interpretations and conclusions based on a multiplicity of voices. The essence of the Further Education and Training (FET – or grades 10, 11 and 12) in History was precisely the emphasis of this tension between politically and disciplinary motivated knowledge development.

Most South African studies on school textbooks have tended to focus more on the political messages of textbooks rather than interrogating the relationship between History as a discipline and the way this is translated into the didactical messages in textbooks. They have largely concentrated on the changing representations of South African History in the textbooks. They have not concerned themselves with the theoretical and methodological problems of textbook (or educational media) analysis as such. For example, a study of South African History textbooks by Polakow-Suransky¹² traces the place of history in the curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa. In the ‘theoretical context’ section the author refers to the work of Apple and Christian-Smith, who discuss texts as setting the canons of truthfulness and re-create a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief and morality really are.¹³ She also refers to Foucault’s conception of history’s function in the curriculum as a tool for introducing discontinuity into our very beings.¹⁴ She does not elaborate on Foucault’s central thesis that everything is historical, including the production of historical knowledge itself. The main purpose of her theoretical discussion is to emphasise the political importance of history teaching in the ‘new’ South Africa. How to derive categories for analysis from such theories, or how such categories operate, is not the concern of this study.

There are recent examples of South African textbook analysis that show how history textbooks now seem to have gone in the opposite direction to what was typical during the apartheid era.¹⁵ For example, Engelbrecht¹⁶ examined nine series of Grades 4–6 primary school history books to identify the extent of racial representation. In accordance with the

11. D. Lowenthal, ‘Dilemmas and Delights of Learning History’, in P. Stearns, P. Seixas and S. Wineburg, eds, *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), 63.
12. S. Polakow-Suransky, ‘Historical Amnesia? The Politics of Textbooks in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, at New Orleans, 1–2 April 2002, 7.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 8.
15. Most analyses of ‘apartheid’ textbooks tended to see them as ideological instruments of a specific political project, namely Afrikaner nationalism. See L. Witz, ‘Beyond van Riebeeck’, in S. Nuttall and C. Michael, eds, *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2000), 318.
16. A. Engelbrecht, ‘The Impact of Role Reversal in Representational Practices in History Textbooks after Apartheid’, *South African Journal of Education*, 28, (2008), 523.

Africanisation¹⁷ thesis, she found that ‘white’ history is marginalised, in that white role models are downplayed and that white people do not feature at all in some textbooks. This ties in with Pretorius’s view that new stereotypes and untruths emerge in the name of democracy, or that there is a tendency towards ‘affirmative action in history writing’, as he puts it.¹⁸ Based on a descriptive study of six history textbooks called *Turning Points in History*, published by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Pretorius shows concern that ‘the Afrikaner does not figure in the “New History” books on South African history, except as the scapegoat and the villain’.

Pretorius’s research, like the work of Engelbrecht, while important in its contribution to empirical findings, is not based on any established theory. Engelbrecht has some scattered references to two theoretical frameworks but does not elaborate on them. Their relationship to each other, or how they informed the choice of both qualitative and quantitative methods, is not explained. For example, the statements: ‘we use a post-modern theoretical perspective to gauge the extent of white and black role reversal in representational practices’;¹⁹ and ‘critical theorists agree that textbooks are socio-cultural agents of formal and hidden curricula’,²⁰ are not unpacked. Similarly, Van Eeden,²¹ in analysing the theme of globalisation in nine approved Grade 12 history textbooks, finds ‘that the focus appears to be (as in the pre-1994 period) to keep the Government’s Ministry of Education happy by not stepping too much on political toes.’ Moreover, she found that textbook activities reflect the political majority of the day, regardless of whether they present the History curriculum, which, according to the author, appears to want to reflect multiple voices. Again, there is no mention of subject-positioning or theoretical considerations within this analysis.

Using a somewhat different topic and taking a different view, Chisholm²² examines migration, citizenship and history textbooks in South Africa. This article is not so much a textbook analysis as an amalgamation of the three topics, drawing on secondary sources and primary documentary and interview-based data. The textbooks used in the study do not occupy a central position in the article, which covers a wider scope and discusses the history of migration, xenophobia, curriculum development and teaching styles. An important finding is that ‘textbook writers write to a constructed image of their audience as barely literate; attempting to write in a popular vein to meet the needs of this population results in a child-like text’.²³ This is of relevance here because it resonates with my own findings and pertains to a dimension of the analysis with regard to language. However, Chisholm’s article is not about the methods of text analysis.

17. ‘Africanisation of education means that the school curriculum of the future will be written to suit the African frame of mind. Africa-related content will replace the Eurocentric content of the previous curriculum.’: W. du Plessis, ‘The Educational and Political Context of Transformation’, in L.R. Reuter and H. Döbert, eds, *After Communism and Apartheid: Transformation of Education in Germany and South Africa* (Frankfurt aM: Peter Lang, 2002), 88.
18. F. Pretorius, ‘Unfair “Affirmative Action” in South African Historiography’, *Yesterday & Today*, 1 (2007), 1.
19. Engelbrecht, ‘The Impact of Role Reversal’, 520.
20. *Ibid.*
21. E. van Eeden, ‘Transcontinental Reflections on the Revised South African History Curriculum on Globalism and National Narratives’, *Yesterday & Today*, 3 (October 2000), 22–23.
22. L. Chisholm, ‘Migration, Citizenship and South African History Textbooks’, *South African Historical Journal*, 60, 3 (2008), 353–374.
23. *Ibid.*, 368.

In sum, in reading the available South African literature, I did not find any publications that have made a significant contribution to the problems of theory and method of textbook analysis. None showed how the subjective position of the reader/researcher influences the use of theory and the development of methods for textbook analysis.

Role of Race and Racism in Grade 11 History

The PhD study from which I write this article looks at a particular topic in history textbooks – that of race and racism – in a set of 10 most recently published Grade 11 South African school history textbooks that have been approved for selection by teachers in public schools.²⁴ Race and racism is presented in the Department of Education’s Grade 11 curriculum as a chapter between two units called ‘Crisis of Capitalism’ and ‘Competing Nationalisms and Identities in Africa’ respectively.²⁵ A chapter on apartheid is separate from the one I am investigating here.

The issue of race and racism is controversial; it blurs the distinction between ‘remembering’ and ‘knowing’. ‘Remembering’ is intensely personal and re-creates previous events according to the subjects’ own biographies, whereas the ‘experience of knowing’ refers to those ‘in which we are aware of knowledge that we possess but in a more impersonal way’.²⁶ The topic of race and racism in South Africa necessarily invokes the personal histories, memories and agendas of the textbook authors and evaluators in a host of varying biographical experiences.²⁷

The History curriculum includes the more impersonal ‘knowing’ because it was ‘conceived in a spirit of transparency that would lay bare the nature of the historian’s craft’²⁸ and discloses the ways in which historians construct their theories. However, although sound in its conception, the curriculum was received and then significantly revised in the Mbeki era that emphasised an assertion of African Renaissance, which concerned itself with recovering African pride and confidence, based on the idea of advanced African culture, language and civilisation.²⁹ In an attempt to address African inferiority, the mission of this renaissance was to emphasise that racism is not ‘real’, but is a purely imagined or socially constructed concept. It was in this political milieu of the Mbeki era that textbook authors interpreted the curriculum and developed content in a specific way.

24. The PhD study is in its final stages of completion. The working title is “What to do with Difference? History textbooks as mediators”, PhD thesis in progress, University of Johannesburg
25. Department of Education (DoE), *National Curriculum Statement Grades 10–12 (General) History* (Pretoria: DoE, 2003), 26. However, many textbooks do not follow the curriculum as such. Instead, they design the sequence and structure of topics according to their own logic.
26. Gardiner and Richardson-Klavehn, cited in J. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 27.
27. Reckwitz, cited in H. Hues and K. Morgan, ‘The Raising of the Flag in “Volkstaat” Orania: Perspectives on a School Ceremony’, *Education as Change*, 14, 1 (2010), 40.
28. R. Siebörger, ‘The Dynamics of History Textbook Production during South Africa’s Educational Transformation’, in Foster and Crawford, *What Shall We Tell the Children?*, 235. For a detailed documentation of how the history curriculum was transformed in the 1990s, see R. Siebörger, ‘Reconceptualising South African History Textbooks’, in *South African Historical Journal*, 30 (1994), 98–108; and R. Siebörger and J. Reid, ‘Textbooks and the School History Curriculum’, *South African Historical Journal*, 33 (1995), 169–77.
29. J. Bam, ‘Negotiating History, Truth and Reconciliation, and Globalization: An Analysis of the Suppression of Historical Consciousness in South African Schools as Case Study’, published in 2000 by University of Western Australia, <http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP1300jb.html>, accessed 12 March 2010.

Most textbook authors are schoolteachers, consultants, or freelance historians from whom one would expect a more ‘remembering’ than a ‘knowing’ type of approach. But many are also high-ranking academic historians from whom readers could expect insight into the nature of the discipline and to be up to date with new trends. But, as I will argue through the examples, some textbooks (with notable exceptions) deprive the readers of a real chance to engage and grapple with the complex and controversial subject matter of race and racism. They do this by uncritically submitting to the ideas prevalent of their time without consciously reflecting on them, and without making their readers aware of the historicity of ideas themselves.

I argue that the analysis of texts (that were borne out of a sound curriculum design) should strive to uncover the historian’s craft. It should disclose the theories and methods that historians used in the writing of their educational texts. The assumption is, I would argue, that pupils serve an apprenticeship as ‘novice’³⁰ historians. My analysis will therefore probe the underlying philosophical questions on which the construction of historical narratives is hinged, with the implication that the apprenticeship in learning history will be linked to this (these) philosophy(ies). An author whose work is considered pioneering (mainly in German-speaking territories) in this regard is Peter Weinbrenner.³¹ His thorough discussion of the foundational tenets implicit in methodological possibilities in the analysis of social sciences textbooks has guided my efforts to find and apply certain theoretical anchor points on which to ground my own work.

Developing Analytical Categories and Applying them in Practice

Weinbrenner proposes that categories developed for textbook research in the social sciences be both multi-dimensional and multi-perspectivist. ‘Multi-dimensionality’ implies that researchers draw from a variety of theoretical fields such as ‘*Fachwissenschaft*’ (scientific subject discipline); ‘*Fachdidaktik*’ (teaching methodology in the specific subject); ‘*Erziehungswissenschaft*’ (pedagogy); ‘*Schulbuchdesign*’ (textbook design); and meta-theories such as ‘*Wissenschafts und Erkenntnistheorie*’ (philosophy of science and epistemology). ‘Multi-perspectivity’ implies that research from such a textured perspective extends beyond the ideological by doing varied types of analyses, ranging from empirical-analytical to critical-innovative to practice-orientated analysis.

Each of these broad theoretical fields is then explained in Weinbrenner’s article in more detail, but here I will briefly mention only two of them: philosophy of science or ‘*Wissenschaftstheorie*’, and its close relative ‘*Fachwissenschaft*’ – or scientific subject discipline. I will use data from my research to illustrate how a theoretical consideration of this type can be interpreted and applied in the practice of textbook analysis.

If the textbook is to serve as a teaching medium through which the real life experiences of learners are to be organised, and with the help of which science is to be explained and made accessible, then it is necessary that the same scientific principles as those of the scientific discovery process itself apply to the construction and analysis of textbooks.³²

30. See J.S. Brown, A. Collins and P. Duguid, ‘Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning’, *Educational Researcher*, 18, 1 (1989), 32–34, and the literature that emerged in the wake of this seminal article in the education literature on apprenticeship as learning mode.

31. See for example, T. Höhne, ‘Schulbuchwissen Umrisse einer Wissens- und Medientheorie des Schulbuches’, (Frankfurt aM: Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, 2003), 29–30.

32. Weinbrenner, ‘Grundlagen und Methodenproblem’, 42, my translation from the German.

THEORY AND METHODS OF TEXT ANALYSIS

What would such a meta-theoretical consideration mean for the study of history? It would mean asking what meta-theoretical framework gave rise to the construction of the content of textbooks. In other words, what was the scientific process of discovery that gave rise to the construction of the text? More precisely, it would mean that the specific types of methods historians use for the collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation of their data should be the same (or at least sufficiently similar to be discernable) as those used in the construction of the contents of textbooks themselves. Often this is not the case. For example, Witz,³³ in examining post-apartheid history textbooks, notes that despite the emphasis on the importance of primary source evidence in the books published in the 1990s, although these books now include such sources, very little is said about the actual production of these sources. Witz uses the diary of Van Riebeeck as an example to show that the textbooks do not concern themselves with exposing the historian's craft of collecting and weighing up their data. The textbooks do not mention that this diary took many different forms. Nor does it explain for whom it was written, how it was written, and indeed who actually wrote it.

Weinbrenner's meta-theoretical consideration would also mean that the type of assessment activities that textbooks contain should mirror the kinds of problems that historians face in their scientific or discipline-specific communities. And this is precisely how I derived one of my analytical criteria: What are the discussions about the discipline of History, if there are any, in the introductions of textbooks? I looked at what stances or positions textbooks take towards their readers and how this is discernable in the text discourse.³⁴ For instance, some books 'speak down' to students using imperatives like 'there are two important skills that you need to develop'.³⁵ Or, in another example:

This year you will be required to work both independently and as part of a group. You will find that you will need to do a lot of investigations so that you can develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will help you become a critical and creative citizen who can participate fully in the social, cultural, political and economic life of South Africa.³⁶

The repeated phrase 'need to' can have a dampening effect on the potentially curious mind and positions the textbook (author) as a controlling (and somewhat condescending and even patronising) role-player. By establishing this kind of initial relationship, textbooks convey certain messages about the process of inquiry, i.e. that the discipline is fixed and known by the textbook and that this knowledge must be transmitted to the learners who 'need to' do a lot of work to understand it, and, what is more, do it in a specific way. The actual methodological issues and dilemmas that historians face are not discussed.

Other books are different. They use a more discipline-specific investigative style and address their readers as 'young historians' in an apprenticeship. For example:

Welcome to *New Africa History* Grade 11. We hope that you will enjoy investigating the past as you work through the units in this book [...] You will be working as historians, investigating the past. Questions are crucial to

33. Witz, 'Beyond van Riebeeck', 338–339.

34. In the tradition of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, positioning in communicative and representational text has become a focal topic. See Heritage, 'Goffman, Garfinkel', 48–52.

35. E. Brink, K. Gibbs, A. Grundlingh, M. Thotse and J. Venter, *History for All: Grade 11 Learner's Book* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 2005), v.

36. F. Graves, S. Grové, R. Mulholland and G. Sutton, *Moments in History: Grade 11 Learner's Book* (Cape Town: Juta Gariep, 2006), viii.

historical enquiry. Not only do we ask questions of the past, but we also ask questions about and of the sources with which we work.³⁷

Another textbook introduces itself like this:

Welcome to the *Viva History* series [...] We will act as detectives using sources to investigate the past, finding the reasons behind actions and the biases that made people act and think the way they did. [...]. But studying History, we can become critical thinkers able to make our own judgments and assessments of events and able to defend our independent point of view with evidence and sound reasoning.³⁸

It is likely that students reading the introductions of these books, especially when compared to the others, would be more favourably inclined towards studying the contents. These examples show the potential effect on students when texts assume certain positions towards them and the task at hand.

The necessity of making the methods of historical enquiry transparent becomes even weightier when the topic under consideration makes use of references to the work of a variety of other types of social scientists, such as archaeologists, palaeontologists and anthropologists. The Report of the History/Archaeology Panel to the Minister of Education³⁹ stresses the essence and importance of history and archaeology, namely to promote reconciliation, reciprocal respect and to include divergent opinions and voices. In addition, there is agreement that a thorough understanding of the science of human evolution is important in undermining the genetic myths which underlie racial prejudice. To meet these criteria, in the textbooks the work of scientists such as archaeologists is put across as central and critical for making certain historical arguments and claims that act as counter-evidence or counter-arguments to the topic under investigation. Hence, I extrapolate what I have discussed thus far and apply it to the texts to highlight some of their problem areas.

I have developed an analytical category that interrogates the validity of claims made by these ‘supporting’ scientists. Are the methods and theories that informed their conclusions made explicit? Can their findings thus be critically assessed? On the whole, I have found the answer to be ‘no’. Readers are expected to accept the veracity of the claims made, without questioning them. This resonates with Johnsen’s findings that the basis for understanding society, as expressed in textbooks, has not been made explicit, but is nevertheless expressed in unambiguous and relatively consistent expository forms.⁴⁰ What makes this difficult and confusing for readers is that at the same time they are expected to question the claims made in the sciences that are now deemed ‘pseudo-sciences’ (but which were not considered such in their time). Let me explain. A central lesson in the chapter on race and racism is that there are ‘pseudo sciences’ such as race theories of the late nineteenth century, which in turn gave rise to Social Darwinism – a significant example of a pseudo science. The books present counter claims by (real?) and contemporary scientists such as anthropologists, archaeologists, geneticists and palaeontologists in an attempt to explain why pseudo-scientific claims are invalid. These counter-arguments are based on discoveries made by these scientists about the existence of

37. N. Frick, S. Janari, A. Proctor, G. Weldon, D. Wray and S. Heese, *New Africa History Grade 11: Working with Evidence from the Past, Learner’s Book* (Cape Town: New Africa Education, 2006), 4.

38. C. Dugmore, E.A. Horner, S. Maggs and R. McLeod, *Viva History Learner’s Book: Grade 11* (Johannesburg: Vivlia, 2006), v.

39. Report of the History/Archaeology Panel to the Minister of Education, 2000, available at: <http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=70331>, accessed 14 March 2010.

40. Johnsen, ‘Are We Looking for It in the Same Way?’, 84.

evidence that ‘proves’ for example that all humans come from Africa (and that therefore, by implication, ‘race’ is a purely socially constructed phenomenon):

In the first half of the 20th century, archaeologists debated about the origin of humankind. In the 1920s evidence was found that suggested that humankind started in Southern Africa. In the 1960s further evidence was found in East Africa which proved that all humankind originated in Africa. Today most scientists believe that our earliest ancestors developed in Southern Africa; that is why South Africa’s Sterkfontein Caves are called ‘the cradle of humankind.’⁴¹

When analysing the language and meaning of ‘factual’ narrative statements like these, I noted that the progression from ‘suggested’ to ‘proved’ presented a big conceptual (or even imaginative) leap, especially since the word ‘believed’ is used as a bridge in the text discourse. The ‘evidence’, in terms of scientific methods, on which this ‘proof’ is based, is not mentioned. Neither is anything said about what the archaeologists actually found to make their assumptions. What is confusing to a reader is that the ‘pseudo-sciences’ were also based on certain assumptions that only later proved to be wrong, or at least only later were accepted to be wrong. The text quoted above does not indicate that the methods of science are also subject to change and that it does not hold to argue pseudo-scientific work in hindsight, when one knows that it was accepted as hard science in its day. That is what history is supposed to do – show the historicity of events as well as the historicity of knowledge systems.

An example from another book is the concluding statement, after a chapter on eugenics, that ‘eugenics proved to be a scientifically baseless set of theories’⁴². It could be argued that eugenics was more than just a set of theories. But more importantly, we are not told how this ‘pseudo-science’ (of eugenics) was actually exposed for its falsity or how scientists discovered that the theories on which it was based, were invalid. Therefore students using this book will not be guided by the text to wonder about what it is that makes one theory baseless and another not, or how knowledge systems evolve and change. They are not led towards pondering about the issue of the shelf life of currently recognised theories that could one day also simply be termed ‘baseless.’

Some textbooks attempt to treat the topic of pseudo-scientific racism from multiple perspectives by providing different sources that contain apparently conflicting opinions. But even so, they remain opinions and beliefs and the basis for the *methods* of archaeology or palaeontology and their adjacent knowledge systems are left hanging. For example:

The conclusion [that Africans are the ancestral population from which all others have diverged] has been contended on both methodological and substantive grounds. Some argue against the statistical methods used ... others argue that there is simply no evidence in recent populations outside Africa of any ‘African’ characteristic.⁴³

Although the sources in this book are not connected by any narrative that would help readers to navigate through them, there is an introduction to this set of sources, which seems clear about the textbook’s stance towards this topic:

41. Brink *et al.*, *History For All*, 130; and J. Botarro, P. Visser, and N. Worden, *In Search of History: Grade 11 Learner’s Book* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2006), 129.

42. Graves *et al.*, *Moments in History*, 131.

43. R. Deftereos, C. Dugmore, C. Geldenhuys, D. Ramoroka, M. Stolz, V. Titus and V. van Reenen, *Making History: Learner’s Book Grade 11* (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 2006), 175.

Scientists agree that the first modern humans probably left Africa, spreading to the rest of the world between about 180 000 and 90 000 years ago. Footprints found at Langebaan on the West Coast of the Cape, dated to 117 000 years ago, support that theory.⁴⁴

Here ‘scientists’ are lumped together into a stereotypical general whole and they all ‘agree’, implying that being a scientist means that such claims are irrefutable because there is agreement. Moreover, it seems unlikely that a set of ‘footprints’ supports a theory as ambitious as this one. How do footprints last 117 000 years? Surely it would be appropriate for the archaeologists and palaeontologists to disclose their methods of discovery and to say something about the way they draw conclusions about their observations. But this does not happen in this book.

However, I am cautious to make generalisations based on these findings since there are textbooks in the sample that do question the scientific process itself, as well as the surrounding discourse. For example:

Few people are willing to critically examine and really think through ideas especially if they are popular and everyone writes and talks about them. Bertrand Russell, the British mathematician and Nobel Prize winner once wrote, ‘People would rather die than think, most do’.⁴⁵

In this book, following this narrative piece, there is a ‘think about this’ box which explains how pseudo-science can still be found today:

Some writers talk about ‘the cult of science’ where people believe anything because a scientist ... says it. New ideas which are often discredited by scientists are later proven to be true. Ideas about what comprises scientific fact change as the years go by. It is wise to remember, ‘yesterday’s science is today’s commonsense and tomorrow’s nonsense’.⁴⁶

Theoretical Possibilities Regarding the Reader as Subject

In this section I will highlight the ontological importance of analysing representations of history in school textbooks. It concerns the question of what it means to exist as a subject or textbook reader/analyst in the world. This question is not often addressed by authors,⁴⁷ Hence I will attempt to make my own position known by a process of reflection about the reading of the textbooks and thus provide an example of taking a position. Nicholls mentions some of the possibilities:

Where a positivist researcher considers subject/object relations to be neutral and passive, critical theorists argue that it is inherently oppressive characterised by alienation and struggle. Alternatively, hermeneuticians are likely to consider the relationship to be circular, based on ever changing interpretations of meaning, while postmodernists might argue that it is necessarily contingent, fractured and multiple.’⁴⁸

It is not easy to position oneself wholly in any one of these categories and I would suggest that it is possible to adopt a combinatory position. In my case the combination would be a positivist/realist assumption that ‘there is a real, measurable world out there’, together with a hermeneutic understanding that the ‘relationship between language, meaning, interpretation and

44. *Ibid.*

45. Dugmore *et al.*, *Viva History*, 105–106.

46. Dubow (1995), quoted in Dugmore *et al.*, *Viva History*, 106.

47. Nicholls, ‘The Philosophical Underpinnings, 24.

48. *Ibid.*, 29.

existence’⁴⁹ is circular in that ‘the interpretation of part of something depends on interpreting the whole, but interpreting the whole depends on an interpretation of the parts’.⁵⁰ What this implies for the subject is that he or she is ‘located in a dynamic, reciprocal and ongoing relationship with texts’.⁵¹

The hermeneutic part of my position presupposes that textbook analysts are members of a particular historically and culturally conditioned, ever-changing ‘life-world’, and that their practices are already laden with theory and temporality.⁵² The emphasis is on understanding these preconceptions and using them in the interpretive process, which should yield a deeper understanding of the text; the process of understanding thus becomes its own result.⁵³ This theoretical position allowed me to interrogate my data based on my own preconceptions.

The realist part of my position means acknowledging that an objective world exists independently of our knowledge of it.⁵⁴ When doing textbook analysis this assumption is important since without it, it would be impossible to treat the text in relation to such things as facts or explanations.⁵⁵ Moreover, the realist stance rejects moral relativism by assuming that moral truths exist.⁵⁶ What makes this ‘hermeneutic realist’ stance different from pure positivism is that ‘the researcher will never assume a complete knowledge or mastery of the textbook’.⁵⁷ Moreover, the role of language and personal history is central for the reader of texts; ‘hermeneutic realism acknowledges that all understanding, including scientific understanding, is historically and linguistically shaped’.⁵⁸

Being driven by different and sometimes conflicting ideologies, while necessary to acknowledge, means that the reader should aim to create some distance from texts. In order to do so, one of the best ways seems to be to analyse the same theme in one book after the other.⁵⁹ This is precisely what I did: I looked at one narrowly defined chapter focus across 10 different textbooks.

Subject Positioning Applied in Practice

I would like to show how some of this theoretically derived methodological positioning can be translated to practice.

The question of disciplinary – in this case historical – literacy revolves around the scholarship of teaching and learning history. As American ex-school history teacher and prominent professor of history education, Robert Bain, explains, many school pupils of history conceive of the subject like this: ‘the past is filled with facts, historians retrieve those facts,

49. *Ibid.*

50. Usher, quoted in Nicholls, ‘The Philosophical Underpinnings’, 30.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Heelan (1997), cited in M. Alvesson and K. Sköldberg, *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 2000), 57.

53. Alvesson *et al.*, ‘*Reflexive Methodology*’, 61.

54. A. Sayer, *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach* (London: Routledge, 1992), 5.

55. S. Selander, ‘Towards a Theory of Pedagogic Text Analysis’, *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 34, 2 (1990), 143–150.

56. D. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do about It* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 158.

57. Scott and Usher, cited in Nicholls, ‘The Philosophical Underpinnings’, 30.

58. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization*, 158–159.

59. Selander, *Towards a Theory of Pedagogic Text Analysis*, 147.

students memorize the facts, and all this somehow improves the present.’⁶⁰ Historical literacy would be something like the opposite view: it is about being able to discern between the facts and their interpretations and learning to master the skills of making the decisions around such discernments explicit and meaningful. History as a school subject requires several ‘modes of thinking’ such as familiarity, comparative judgement, awareness of manifold truths, appreciation of authority and hindsight.⁶¹

The South African public school curriculum embraces many of these aspects of history education by pointing out that studying history includes careful evaluation of a broad range of evidence and diverse points of view; a critical understanding of socio-economic systems; and the view that historical truth consists of a multiplicity of voices expressing varying and often contradictory versions of the same history.⁶² In my text analysis, I wanted to find out whether textbooks were achieving this aim. Bearing the hermeneutic realist stance in mind, I had to ask myself what my preconceptions were when I first approached the data. In my case this was influenced strongly by my university/higher education background, which was a mixture between one that called for submission to a particular sociological ideology on the one hand, and a more ‘discovery’ type, on the other. The former required an acceptance of the dominant ideology (the ‘correct’ interpretations of past events) at a particular institution at a particular time. The latter demonstrated how, when historical information is presented through multiple perspectives, showing contrasting positions and interpretations, a student is led to arrive at his/her own conclusions, and these do not necessarily have to conform to a ‘pre-determined’ or ‘correct’ interpretation of the past.

One useful way of finding out how the texts related to the curriculum’s aims was to look carefully at the introduction of each book to see what kinds of promises they make and in what language they couch their introductory address. Below I illustrate, in conversational style, some of my first impressions when I read one of the textbook’s opening remarks.⁶³ My annotations show my immediate reaction:

- ‘Ensure that any information you have is interpreted clearly and unambiguously’: Multiple interpretations are not a consideration.
- ‘Decide how accurate the information is’:
An inexperienced school student of history would not be able to make a decision like this.
- ‘You need to ask some questions of the sources to enable you to interpret and use the information in the source correctly’:
Here the assumption is that there is a ‘correct’ interpretation.
- On the question of detecting bias, this book cautions that ‘there is a difference between an individual perspective and a perspective that is influenced by bias or prejudice’:
It is not clear how an individual perspective is *not* influenced by bias and prejudice. The language is obtuse.

60. Bain, R., ‘Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape History Instruction’, in P. Stearns, P. Seixas and S. Wineburg, eds, *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), 337.

61. Lowenthal, ‘Dilemmas and Delights’, 64.

62. Department of Education, *National Curriculum Statement, Grades 10–12*, 9.

63. Brink *et al.*, *History for All*, v.

THEORY AND METHODS OF TEXT ANALYSIS

If this is the introduction to the book, it is difficult to imagine how the stated aims of the curriculum are being fulfilled, especially vis-à-vis multiple interpretations of events. It does not provide much hope for representing historical knowledge as an ongoing search, but points rather to such knowledge being presented as a closed, authoritative body of facts.⁶⁴ History is about process and therefore about challenging the status quo, which is fundamentally at odds with ideas of stability, constancy, and predictability.⁶⁵ Producing historical knowledge requires an ongoing awareness and disclosure about the methods of such production, as exemplified by the work of Bank.⁶⁶ Within such an understanding of history, there is no one ‘correct’ interpretation.⁶⁷ A further example shows how some textbooks adopt a very different discourse to historical knowledge production. It is a ‘support activity’ (meaning that it is aimed at students with lower ability), which reads as follows:

Even with the Europeans often being racist, there were cases of them marrying local women and having children. This sometimes led to a policy called assimilation where these children were accepted into the social life of the Europeans in the colony. Can you think why this did not stop the Europeans being racist and why it often made their racism worse?⁶⁸

I noted the repeated use of the generalised phrase ‘the Europeans’ as if they represented a homogenous group with the same attitudes and behaviours. It would encourage a perpetuation of stereotypes by the learners. Moreover, the preceding narratives, descriptions, and sources in this textbook did not address this issue. Hence, students are expected to embark on a psychological exercise, without the tools to achieve it. The teacher guide provides the following suggestions as an answer:

Although the children of mixed marriages were sometimes accepted into European society, their non-European parent seldom was. This meant that the acceptance was not complete, so there would be limits on how far into society they could go and they were seen as inferior. A new level of racism developed. If these people were partly accepted then those who were rejected (the African) must be pushed even further down the social scale and so racism intensified.⁶⁹

Students would not be able to come to this answer apart from imaginative speculation or being told by the teacher (the guide). This is similar to what Witz has found when examining the changing images of Jan van Riebeeck in South African history in textbooks. He quotes from a 1996 publication: ‘In exercises students are encouraged to argue against the statement that

64. T. van Leeuwen and S. Selander, ‘Picturing “Our” Heritage in the Pedagogic Text: Layout and Illustration in an Australian and a Swedish History Textbook’, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 27, 5 (1995), 520.

65. C. Kros, ‘Telling Lies and then Hoping to Forget about History’, *South African Historical Journal*, 42 (2000), 86.

66. A. Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2006). This book reveals the historian’s craft by bringing together a range of primary narratives; different and sometimes conflicting perspectives; varying interpretations of the same event; and so on. It generally gives the reader a sense of the complexity and specificity of the story that unfolds and does away with a master narrative.

67. See also F. Pingel, ‘The Destruction of Human Identity in Concentration Camps: The Contribution of Social Sciences to an Analysis of Behaviour under Extreme Conditions’, in F. Pingel, ed., *Grenzgänger/Transcending Boundaries* (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2009), 59–82 for an example of how the complex reality of concentration camp survivors can be captured in historical analysis.

68. Brink et al., *History for All*, 74.

69. *Ibid.*, 98.

“South Africa had no history before 1652”, yet there is in effect very little in terms of events and changes supplied on which they can base their arguments.’⁷⁰

I also found that many books do exactly what the History/Archaeology Report cautioned against when it recommended that instead of providing flat, uniform narratives, all textbooks should try to reveal how historians debate varying approaches, encouraging learners to make judgements based on evidence.⁷¹ I argue that some textbooks achieve the opposite and reduce historical thinking to simple generalisations. For example, one textbook, discussing eugenics, explains it as follows:

Pseudo-Scientific theories of race

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the developed world did ‘research’ and developed ‘scientific’ theories to prove these racial theories. These theories were a form of pseudo-science – a collection of beliefs or practices which were mistakenly regarded as being based on scientific method. Social differences that were actually based in race and class were attributed to genetics. Social Darwinism tended to place white Europeans higher up the human evolutionary tree. Some even believed you could tell how evolved or civilised people were by measuring the size of their skulls or the slope of their noses.⁷²

This excerpt shows how vague and generalised the textbook is in conveying the methods of ‘scientific theories’. The first sentence could imply that ‘doing research’ can be equated with the downside of the developed world, which somehow led to racism. The reader does not find out what the ‘mistakes’ of such pseudo-science really were, other than that they served to legitimise racial oppression,⁷³ notably by ‘white Europeans’. This is an example of how narratives are reduced to sterile, stereotypical terms and in the process diminish historical complexity,⁷⁴ promoting narrow minded classification and making judgements instead of moving towards reconciliation.

There are, however, other examples that treat this topic differently. Below is an excerpt from a textbook that attempts to illustrate how the question of prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, and so forth led to genocide, and what the relevance of such historical events have for us today. It is an account of how, in 1933, a high school student, Helene Jacobs, refused to co-operate with the new Nazi government. Her recollections are captured as a primary source:

Anywhere it said, ‘For Aryans only’, I said, ‘What’s that? There is no such thing.’ I kept myself away from such requirements ... They distributed questionnaires and you had to say whether you had an ‘Aryan’ ancestor. Everyone filled them out. I said, “We can’t go along with this; it’s not legal. We must do something against this and throw the questionnaires away.”... But today – the other people my age, they behaved totally differently at that time. Most of them built their careers then. When I said, ‘I’m not going to have anything to do with this’, I isolated myself.⁷⁵

Noteworthy is the fact that the source reconstructs an account of an *individual* who has a name and who is placed in a particular location at a particular time. In addition, the source not only presents a different perspective of an historical event (different in that it tells a story from a resistor’s point of view, instead of the usual harrowing account from the victim’s perspective),

70. Witz, ‘Beyond Van Riebeeck’, 336.

71. Report of the History/Archaeology Panel.

72. M. Friedman, C. Saunders, M. Jacobs, Y. Seleti and J. Gordon, *Looking into the Past: Source-based History for Grade 11* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 2006), 166.

73. *Ibid.*, 164.

74. J.A. LaSpina, ‘Designing Diversity: Globalization, Textbooks, and the Story of Nations’, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 35, 6 (2003), 679.

75. Frick *et al.*, *New Africa*, 114.

but also taps into issues of morality and is of historical relevance to today's children. Its message about moral truth is simple: many small choices add up to big choices and we must not be put off doing what is right because we cannot see the immediate consequences of our seemingly insignificant actions.

This same book stresses that 'sources in a textbook can seldom give the whole picture'.⁷⁶ It also makes a point of repeatedly bringing in the perspectives of those who resisted the ideological climate of their time. For example, one source on the issue of eugenics mentions Charles Bernstein who, says the author,

was one of the few Americans of the early 1900s to challenge the idea that those considered 'mentally retarded' [or, in today's jargon, intellectually challenged] should be institutionalised. He was convinced that education would help the 'feeble-minded' to become self-sufficient and he began to release inmates after giving them training'.⁷⁷

Bernstein's stance is validated in the textbook by an extract from a letter dated 1917, written to him by a former inmate:

Just a few lines to tell you that I am still alive and in the best of health. I am now in the US Navy. I enlisted July 9th and I am now at the Training Station at Newport, R.I. and expect to leave here on the ship next week for France. This is a fine place down here. There are about 10 000 boys down here. There isn't a chance to get lonesome. There are a lot of boys in your institution who I think if they were in the navy it would make a man of them. I was considered feeble-minded once, but I was given the chance to prove I was not. I am now in a place where you have to have a strong mind and be quick witted. I am proud to say that I am just as good as any of them. The reason for me getting out of that I once got in is that I made a fool of the ones that tried to make a fool out of me. You must remember me, the kind of a boy that I was, so if there are any others like me, give them a chance, they will make good.⁷⁸

This could be interpreted as a way of showing how hope and humanity cannot only be used to overcome the dominant eugenic ideology of the time, but also to show the choices individuals have in their responses and attitudes when faced with injustice. It 'historicises' the topic by pointing to an exceptional attitude adopted during a particular time period and in a particular place, instead of portraying a generalised and homogenous picture of 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. But it must be said that this book is exceptional in its treatment of this sensitive topic.

Conclusion

In this article I have reflected on an 'approach to knowledge construction',⁷⁹ in text analysis by showing how some aspects of my personal history as well as theoretical positioning could be made explicit. Naming and reflecting on this positioning led me to an understanding of how I formulated some of my analytical questions vis-à-vis the data.

The choice to focus on how textbooks treat the 'scientific' methods of the disciplines they draw on (history, archaeology, paleontology, genetics, etc) was informed by the pioneering work of Peter Weinbrenner who argued that in order to derive sound content, textbooks should use the same scientific principles in producing the knowledge in textbooks as those that inform the

76. *Ibid.*, 122.

77. *Ibid.*, 106.

78. *Ibid.*

79. Wetherell *et al.*, *Discourse Theory and Practice*, 1.

scientific discipline itself. This includes making transparent and applying these discipline-specific methods in the textbooks. As I have shown, some textbooks failed in this regard, with the consequence that a logic of inquiry was presented to students that might be confusing and contradictory. However, other textbooks were more successful in this respect and drew attention to the historicity of scientific knowledge.

The other theoretical consideration was the position of the subject (reader or analyst) towards her/his object of study (textbooks). I attempted to show that it is possible to combine a realist stance while at the same time using hermeneutic text analysis. This position is that of making the act of understanding more important than any definite end results. In some cases this process of understanding revealed how narratives can be flat, sterile and stereotypical, while in other cases the reader is drawn in through a discourse or a narrative that connects to his or her humanity rather than judgement.

The overall conclusion is that since ‘there are no recipes for analyzing the attitudes that lie behind a linguistic expression, nor is there any objective method for either verifying or disproving the results of such an analysis’,⁸⁰ the most useful thing to do, if one accepts this limitation, is to make methodological choices explicit and to reflect on the process of their development. This should then give validity to *that particular* study. The examples I have chosen here have highlighted this developmental process as applicable to my study.

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